

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PANAMA 04002 032140Z

ACTION ARA-10

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TAGS: PFOR, PN,PQ

SUBJECT: CLIMATE UNSETTLED

REF: A. PANAMA 3887

B. HINSON-BECKER LETTER, 5/31/77

SUMMARY:LOCAL MEDIA HAVE COVERED A SERIES OF ALLEGED
"PROVOCATIONS" AND "AGGRESSIONS" EMANATING FROM THE
CANAL ZONE THIS WEEK. ON THE WHOLE, TREATMENT HAS
BEEN MORE RESTRAINED THAN IT COULD HAVE BEEN. WHILE
LACKING THE ELEMENTS OF
A FULL-BLOWN ORCHESTRATED
CAMPAIGN, THE WEEK CLEARLY ILLUSTRATES AN UNSETTLED
CLIMATE ALONG THE CANAL ZONE BOUNDARY. END SUMMARY.

1. DURING THE PAST WEEK THE LOCAL MEDIA--LEAD AS USUAL
BY "CRITICA"--HAVE COVERED A VARIETY OF ALLEGED
"PROVOCATIONS" AND "AGGRESSIONS" EMANATING FROM THE
CANAL ZONE.

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PAGE 02 PANAMA 04002 032140Z

2. ON MONDAY, MAY 30, "CRITICA" LET OFF A BLAST
AT MRS. PATRICIA FULTON PRINTING A LETTER SHE
SENT TO SENATOR JAVITS ABOUT SOME ANTI-SEMITIC
FLYSHEETS THAT CIRCULATED HERE A FEW WEEKS AGO.
THIS WAS TWISTED INTO A "ZONIAN" ATTEMPT TO CREATE
DISHARMONY WITH LOCAL JEWISH COMMUNITY.(COPY OF
ARTICLE REF B). THIS WAS FOLLOWED ON JUNE 1 BY A

RESOLUTION OF THAT COMMUNITY EXPRESSING FULL SUPPORT
OF PANAMA'S CANAL TREATY POLICY.

3. ON MAY 31, THE "AGRESSIOON" OF THE DAY WAS THE
WOUNDING OF A NATIONAL GURDSMAN ALLEGEDLY BY A
MAN SUSPECTED OF BEING A U.S. ARMY DESERTER (REF A).
STORY WAS COVERED BY ALL LOCAL PAPERS. ON JUNE 2,
IT WAS REPORTED THAT ATTORNEY GENERAL HAD REQUESTED
FOREIGN MINISTRY TO INITIATE EXTRADITION PROCEEDINGS
AGAINST THE SUSPECT. JUNE 3 "CRITICA" REHASHED
STORY, SNIPED AT FACT THAT SUSPECT (WHOM IT ALREADY
PRESUMES IS GUILTY) HAD NOT BEEN DELIVERED OVER
TO GOP, AND SPECULATED THAT HE MAY HAVE BEEN SPIRITED
AWAY FROM THE ISTHMUS.

4. FYI: EMBASSY HAS NOT RECEIVED ANY FORMAL REQUEST

FOR EXTRADITION: PERHAPS BECAUSE BOTH FOREIGN MINISTER
AND VICE-MINISTER ARE OUT OF TOWN. IDENTIFICATION OF
THE GUARDSMAN'S ASSAILANT AS THE US ARMY DESERTER
CUEVAS WAS MADE FROM AN ID CARD BELONGING TO CUEVAS
FOUND IN THE TAXI. THUS, IT IS NOT YET POSSIBLE TOO
CONCLUDE DEFINITELY THAT CUEVAS WAS IN FACT THE
ASSAILANT. TO DATE, CUEVAS HAS NOT BEEN CAPTURED.
END FYI.

5. ALL WEEK, "CRITICA" HAS GRUMBLED ABOUT THE CASE
OF A PANAMANIAN EMPLOYEE OF CITIBANK BRANCH IN CANAL
ZONE WHO IS TO BE TRIED I US CANAL ZONE COURT FOR A
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PAGE 03 PANAMA 04002 032140Z

MAJOR EMBEZZLEMENT. PAPER HAS NOT ARGUED HIS
INNOCENCE, BUT ALLEGES THAT HE WAS TAKEN "AT GUNPOINT"
FROM HIS HOME IN PANAMA BY HIS SUPERIORS AT BANK TO
CANAL ZONE AUTHORITIES. IT ARGUES THAT CRIMES COMMITTED
BY PANAMANIAN IN PANAMA SHOULD BE TRIED BY PANAMA
UNDER ITS OWN LAWS. (PANCANAL AUTHORITIES STATE
THAT THE OFFENDER VOLUNTARILY CAME FORWARD TO CANAL
ZONE AUTHORITIES.)

6. JUNE 2 "CRITICA" AND "REPUBLICA" ALLEGED THAT A
CANAL ZONE POLICEMAN NAMED MCCARRAGHER HAD THROWN A
FLASHLIGHT THROUGH THE REAR WINDOW OF A PANAMANIAN'S
CAR ON 4TH OF JULY AVENUE AFTER THE CAR FAILED TO
MOVE ON AT THE POLICEMAN'S INSTRUCTION. "CRITICA"
FEATURED A PICTURE OF A BROKEN CAR WINDOW AND A FLASH-
LIGHT, ALLEGEDLY MCCARRAGHER'S. FYI:
PANCANAL ADVISES THAT CANAL ZONE POLCIE OFFICER PATRICK
MCCARRAGHER WAS ON PATROL AT THE TIME OF THIS ALLEGED
INCIDENT. THE VEHICLE IN QUESTION MADE AN ILLEGAL

U-TURN AND STOPPED NEXT TO A YELLOW-MARKED CURB (I.E., NO STOPPING). MCCARRAGHER APPROACHED THE VEHICLE FROM ITS FRONT QUARTER. THE DRIVER THEN ACCELERATED TOWARD MCCARRAGHER, WHO THREW HIS FLASHLIGHT PARTIALLY BECAUSE OF THE VEHICLE'S APPARENT FLIGHT AND PARTIALLY BECAUSE HE THOUGHT IT WAS GOING TO HIT HIM.

THE FLASHLIGHT DID GO THROUGH THE CAR WINDOW, AND REMAIN IN THE VEHICLE--THE ONE PICTURED IN "CRITICA" PROBABLY IS MCCARRAGHER'S. END FYI.

7. COMMENT: THIS COVERAGE HAS GENERALLY LINKED ALL OF THE FOREGOING EVENTS AND THE RECENT WOUNDING OF A PANAMANIAN YOUTH BY A CANAL ZONE POLICEMAN INTO A "CLIMATE OF PROVOCATIONS" EMANATING FROM THE ZONE. THE REPORTAGE IS DEFINITELY SLANTED--IT CLEARLY PRESUMES THAT NO ONE FROM THE CANAL ZONE CAN DO ANY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 04 PANAMA 04002 032140Z

THING RIGHT. HOWEVER, DISTORTED THE FACTS OF AN INDIVIDUAL CASE BECOME, THE PRESS PERCEPTION AND REFLECTION OF A DEFINITELY UNSETTLED CLIMATE ALONG THE BOUNDARY APPEARS TO BE SINCERE.

9. THIS SERIES OF REPORTS HAS LACKED THE SPECTACULAR PLAY OF MOST OF THE PERIODIC ORCHESTRATED ANTI-CANAL ZONE CAMPAIGNS OF THE PAST YEAR. THIS WEEK'S COVERAGE HAS NOT BEEN CONFINED TO THE USUAL NEMESIS OF THE ZONE, "CRITICA", AT LEAST SOME COVERAGE OF ONE OR MORE OF THESE SITUATIONS HAS APPEARED IN EVERY LOCAL PAPER. ALTHOUGH ARTICLES HAVE INCLUDED CONSIDERABLE SNIPING, THE USUAL FOLLOW-UP BY EDITORIALS AND COLUMNISTS HAS BEEN LACKING.

10. THE GOP COULD, IF IT CHOSE, MAKE FAR MORE OF THIS WEEK'S NEWS AND EVENTS IN THE RECENT PAST THAN IT HAS. WITHIN THE PAST MONTH, AMID A SERIES OF OTHER "PROVOCATIONS", THREE PANAMANIAN, ONE A NATIONAL GUARDSMAN, HAVE BEEN REPORTED AS SHOT AND WOUNDED BY THREE UNIFORMED AMERICAN PERSONNEL FROM THE ZONE. THIS IS THE STUFF OF WHICH RIOTS COULD BE MADE, IF THEY SO DESIRED. WE DO NOT BELIEVE THE GOP WANTS ANY SUCH THING. IT ALLOWS ENOUGH PRESS COVERAGE TO SERVE AS A FOCUS FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL TENSION AND INDIGNATION-- AND TO AVOID CHARGES FROM THE LEFT THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS "COVERING UP" FOR THE "GRINGOS". BUT THIS STOPS SHORT OF A MAJOR INDIGNATION DRIVE THAT, IN TODAY'S POTENTIALLY-EXPLOSIVE

PSYCHOLOGICAL ATMOSPHERE ON BOTH SIDES OF THE BOUNDARY,
COULD HAVE VERY UNFORTUNATE CONSEQUENCES.
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